

Colostrum—A First Milk & Its Benefits

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Abstract— This comprehensive review provides an in-depth analysis of colostrum, the first milk produced postpartum, highlighting its unique benefits and potential applications. The review synthesizes scientific research on the immunological, nutritional, and therapeutic properties of colostrum, emphasizing its role in enhancing neonatal health and supporting immune function. It examines the composition of colostrum, including its rich concentration of antibodies, growth factors, and bioactive compounds, and explores its impact on gut health, disease prevention, and overall well-being.

The study also addresses current manufacturing practices, quality control measures, and regulatory considerations, offering insights into the commercial use of colostrum-based supplements. By integrating clinical findings and market trends, the review reflects on the evolving understanding of colostrum's value and its implications for health and wellness.

Keywords— Colostrum, First Milk, Immunoglobulins, Health Benefits, Immune Support, Nutritional Supplement,

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I. INTRODUCTION

Colostrum, often heralded as the "first milk," is a vital secretion produced by mammals during the initial postpartum period. Unlike mature milk, which emerges later, colostrum is rich in essential nutrients and bioactive compounds crucial for the newborn's early development. This initial fluid is not merely a transitional stage but serves as a critical foundation for the newborn's health. It bridges the gap between intrauterine life and the external environment, equipping the infant with a robust start to life outside the womb.

The unique composition of colostrum is a result of sophisticated physiological processes that begin during late pregnancy. It is characterized by its high concentration of proteins, immunoglobulins, growth factors, and other nutrients, all tailored to meet the newborn's immediate needs. These components play a fundamental role in establishing the infant's immune defense, promoting healthy development, and ensuring a smooth transition from fetal to postnatal life. Colostrum's rich composition underscores its significance as a vital, natural supplement during the early stages of life, offering both protective and developmental benefits.

A. Definition and Composition

Colostrum is defined as the initial secretion produced by mammals in the days immediately following childbirth. This early milk is distinct from regular milk in both color and composition, often appearing yellowish due to its high levels of beta-carotene (Mcgrath et al., 2015). Key components of colostrum include immunoglobulins (IgG, IgA, and IgM), which provide crucial passive immunity by offering antibodies that protect against infections (Hurley & Theil, 2015).

Additionally, colostrum contains growth factors such as epidermal growth factor (EGF) and transforming growth factor-beta (TGF- β), which aid in the development and repair of the newborn's gastrointestinal tract (Khan et al., 2024). The nutrient profile of colostrum includes a rich assortment of proteins, vitamins, minerals, and enzymes that are essential for the newborn's growth and immune function.

B. Importance of Colostrum for Newborns

The importance of colostrum for newborns is multifaceted. It plays a critical role in immune system development by delivering a concentrated dose of antibodies that help protect the infant from pathogens and bolster the immune system. This passive immunity is particularly vital in the early days of life when the newborn's own immune system is not yet fully developed (Arslan et al., 2021).

Beyond immune support, colostrum provides essential nutritional support, including proteins, fats, and carbohydrates, that are necessary for the infant's growth and energy needs. The growth factors present in

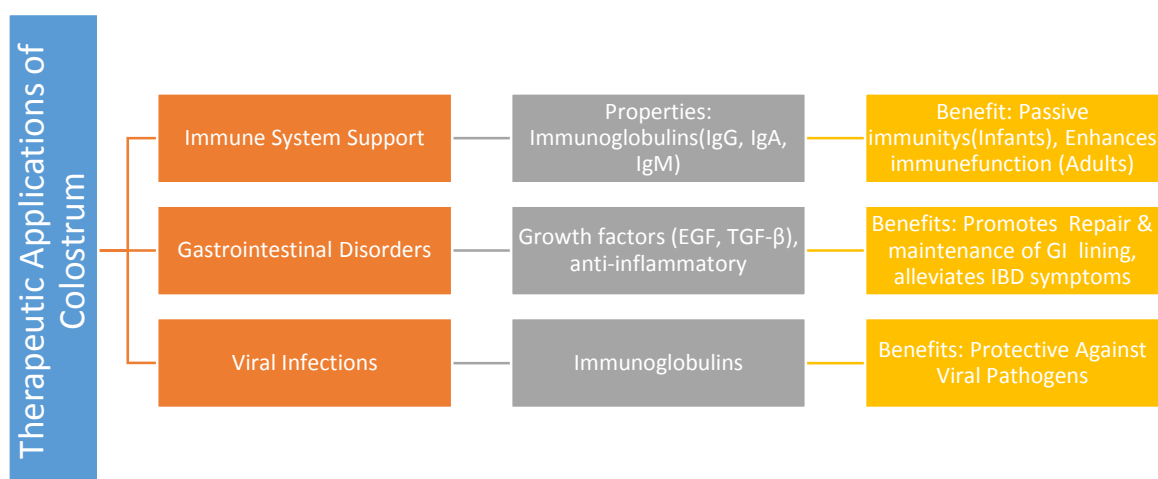
colostrum also promote the maturation of the digestive system, facilitating better nutrient absorption and overall health.

C. Historical and Cultural Significance

Historically, colostrum has been recognized and utilized for its health benefits across various cultures. Traditional uses of colostrum include its role in enhancing immunity and treating a range of ailments, reflecting its value in early human health practices.

In contemporary times, the applications of colostrum have expanded significantly. Modern cultures continue to utilize colostrum not only in traditional dietary practices but also in advanced health products such as dietary supplements, functional foods, and pharmaceuticals. This evolution in its use highlights the enduring significance of colostrum and its broadening role in supporting health and well-being across different contexts.

II. Therapeutic Applications of Colostrum



[Figure 1: Therapeutic Applications of Colostrum]

Colostrum's therapeutic potential extends beyond its role in neonatal nutrition, demonstrating significant benefits in various medical and health contexts. Its rich composition of immune factors, growth factors, and bioactive compounds makes it a promising candidate for supporting immune function, addressing gastrointestinal disorders, and managing viral infections. As scientific research continues to uncover the diverse applications of colostrum, it is becoming increasingly evident that this first milk offers valuable therapeutic advantages across different health conditions.

The therapeutic applications of colostrum are underpinned by its ability to modulate immune responses, improve gut health, and potentially mitigate viral infections. Clinical studies and research have highlighted its efficacy in enhancing immune function, managing chronic gastrointestinal conditions, and providing a supplementary defense against emerging viral threats (Parab et al., 2020). As we explore these therapeutic uses, we get insights into how colostrum is being utilized and its potential future applications in medical practice.

A. Immune System Support

Colostrum is renowned for its potent immune-enhancing properties. As evidenced by Hurley & Theil (2015), the immunoglobulins contained in colostrum, particularly IgG, IgA, and IgM, play a crucial role in bolstering the immune system. These antibodies provide immediate passive immunity to newborns, protecting them against a range of pathogens during the early stages of life. Beyond infancy, colostrum's immune-supportive benefits extend to adults, particularly in managing immune-related conditions and enhancing overall immune function.

Clinical evidence underscores colostrum's effectiveness in supporting immune health. Research by Ghosh & Iaccuci (2021) has demonstrated that colostrum supplementation can lead to improved immune responses, increased resistance to infections, and a reduction in the severity of common illnesses. It also shows

that colostrum can aid in the management of conditions such as chronic fatigue syndrome and recurrent respiratory infections, highlighting its broad-spectrum immune benefits

B. Treatment of Gastrointestinal Disorders

Colostrum has shown considerable promise in the treatment of gastrointestinal disorders. Its impact on gut health is significant due to its content of growth factors, such as epidermal growth factor (EGF) and transforming growth factor-beta (TGF- β), which promote the repair and maintenance of the gastrointestinal lining (Playford & Weiser, 2021). This can be particularly beneficial for individuals suffering from inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD) and other chronic gastrointestinal conditions.

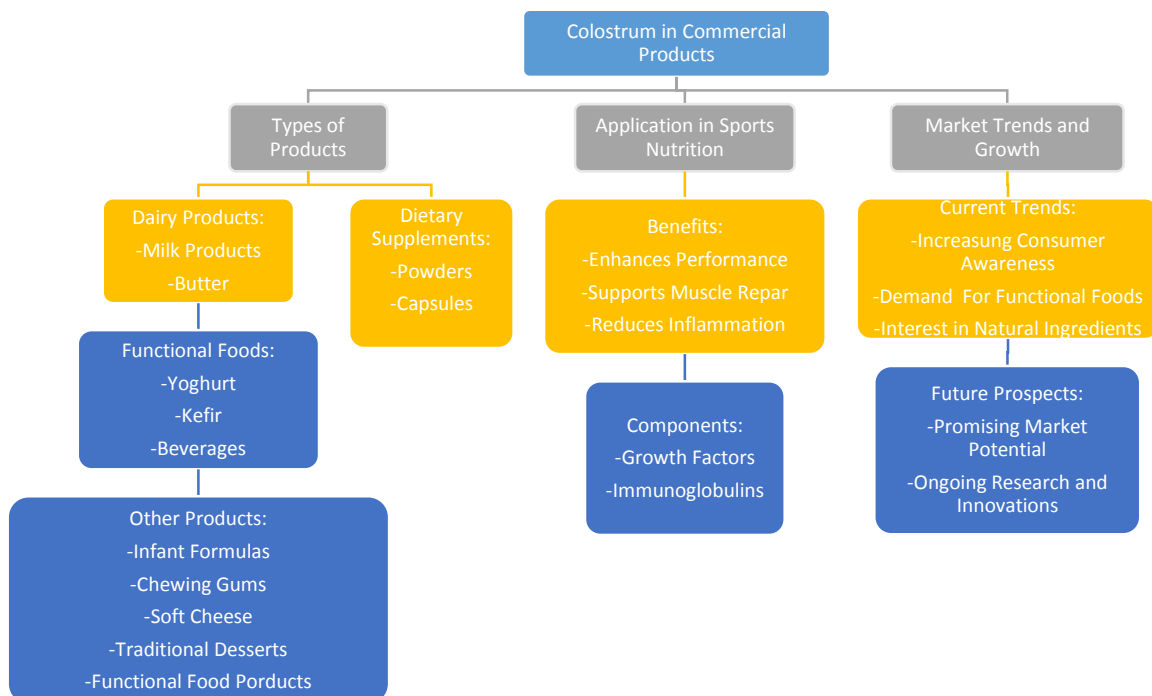
The anti-inflammatory properties of colostrum also play a critical role in managing gut health. By reducing inflammation and promoting mucosal healing, colostrum can alleviate symptoms associated with conditions like Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis (Chandwe & Kelly, 2021). Colostrum supplementation can improve gut permeability and reduce damage markers, contributing to better digestive health and overall well-being.

C. Potential in Managing Viral Infections

Recent studies have explored the potential of colostrum in managing viral infections, including its application in combating COVID-19. The immunoglobulins present in colostrum are known to have antiviral properties, which may offer protective benefits against various viral pathogens. Preliminary research from El-Loly (2022) suggests that colostrum could help reduce the severity of symptoms and provide a supplementary defense against viral infections.

Specifically, research on colostrum's efficacy in relation to COVID-19 has highlighted its potential as a non-drug alternative for managing the disease. Evidence suggests that colostrum may help prevent infection and mitigate the severity of COVID-19 symptoms. Although further clinical trials are needed, current findings indicate that colostrum supplementation could be a valuable addition to the arsenal of treatments and preventive measures against viral diseases.

III. Colostrum in Commercial Products



[Figure 2: Colostrum Use in Commercial Products]

As the health benefits of colostrum become increasingly recognized, it has found its way into a variety of commercial products designed to leverage its nutritional and therapeutic properties. The integration of colostrum into various consumer goods reflects its versatility and growing popularity in the wellness industry.

Colostrum is being incorporated into a wide range of commercial products, from dairy items to dietary supplements and functional foods. Its ability to enhance immune function, support gut health, and aid in muscle recovery has driven its inclusion in products aimed at improving overall health and performance. This growing interest is mirrored by evolving market trends and an optimistic outlook for the future of colostrum-based products.

We explore the diverse types of colostrum-based products, their specific applications in sports nutrition, and the current market trends that highlight the expanding role of colostrum in both everyday health and specialized nutrition.

A. Types of Colostrum-Based Products

Colostrum has been incorporated into numerous commercial products, leveraging its rich nutritional profile to enhance consumer offerings. Dairy products fortified with colostrum, such as milk drinks and butter, capitalize on the milk's innate immunological benefits. These products are designed to provide additional immune support and nutritional value, making them appealing to health-conscious consumers.

In addition to dairy products, colostrum is increasingly found in dietary supplements and functional foods. These include powders, capsules, and tablets that concentrate colostrum's bioactive components. Functional foods such as yogurt, kefir, and various types of beverages also incorporate colostrum to offer enhanced nutritional benefits and support overall health. The versatility of colostrum allows it to be utilized in diverse product formulations, catering to a broad audience interested in health and wellness. Here is a comprehensive list of commercial products in which colostrum is found:

- **Milk Drinks:** These beverages are fortified with colostrum to enhance their nutritional profile. Colostrum-enriched milk drinks provide additional immune support and vital nutrients, appealing to those seeking functional benefits in their daily beverages.
 - **Butter:** Colostrum-infused butter combines the traditional dairy product with the added benefits of colostrum. It offers enhanced nutritional value, including immune-boosting properties, while maintaining its role in cooking and baking.
 - **Powders:** Colostrum powders are concentrated forms of colostrum, available for easy incorporation into various foods and beverages. They are popular among consumers looking for a convenient way to boost their intake of colostrum's bioactive components.
 - **Capsules and Tablets:** These dietary supplements provide colostrum in a concentrated, easy-to-swallow form. They are often used by individuals seeking targeted immune support or other health benefits associated with colostrum.
 - **Yogurt:** Colostrum-enriched yogurt integrates the benefits of colostrum with the probiotic advantages of yogurt. This product supports digestive health while also offering additional immune support.
 - **Kefir:** A fermented dairy product that combines colostrum with beneficial bacteria. Colostrum-enriched kefir promotes gut health and provides a source of bioactive components for overall wellness.
 - **Beverages:** Various drinks, including smoothies and health drinks, may incorporate colostrum to enhance their nutritional value. These beverages offer a convenient way to consume colostrum along with other healthful ingredients.
 - **Infant Formulas:** Colostrum is added to infant formulas to provide newborns with the immune-boosting benefits of colostrum, supporting their early development and health.
 - **Chewing Gums:** Chewing gums fortified with colostrum offer a unique way to deliver the benefits of colostrum in a convenient, on-the-go format.
 - **Soft Cheese:** Colostrum-infused soft cheeses provide a flavorful way to enjoy the nutritional benefits of colostrum, often catering to those looking for diverse ways to include it in their diet.
 - **Traditional Desserts (e.g., Khess):** Some traditional desserts are being adapted to include colostrum, combining cultural flavors with the health benefits of colostrum.
 - **Functional Food Products:** These include a variety of products, such as energy bars and meal replacements, that integrate colostrum to offer enhanced nutritional and immune support.
- Each of these products leverages colostrum's rich composition of immunoglobulins, growth factors, and other bioactive components to support health and wellness in various ways.

B. Application in Sports Nutrition

In the world of sports nutrition, colostrum has gained attention for its potential to enhance athletic performance and support recovery. The presence of growth factors and immunoglobulins in colostrum is believed to contribute to improved muscle repair and recovery post-exercise. These components help reduce exercise-induced inflammation and promote faster healing of muscle tissues (Yalçıntaş et al., 2024).

Athletes and fitness enthusiasts benefit from colostrum's ability to boost immune function and reduce the risk of illness during periods of intense training. The use of colostrum-based supplements in sports nutrition underscores its role in not only enhancing performance but also supporting long-term athletic health by mitigating the effects of rigorous physical activity.

C. Market Trends and Growth

The market for colostrum-based products is experiencing notable growth, driven by increasing consumer awareness and demand for functional foods and dietary supplements. Current market trends highlight a strong interest in natural and health-promoting ingredients, with colostrum being a prominent example. The versatility

of colostrum products—ranging from dietary supplements to functional foods—reflects a growing consumer preference for products that offer comprehensive health benefits.

Looking ahead, the prospects for colostrum products appear promising. The expanding use of colostrum in various health and wellness applications suggests a robust market potential. As research continues to reveal new benefits and applications, the commercial landscape for colostrum-based products is expected to evolve, with ongoing innovations likely to drive further growth and market expansion.

IV. Colostrum and Specific Health Conditions

Colostrum, often recognized for its crucial role in the early development of newborns, has garnered attention for its potential benefits in managing various health conditions in adults. The unique combination of growth factors, immunoglobulins, and other bioactive components in colostrum extends its therapeutic applications beyond neonatal care.

Recent research and clinical studies have highlighted colostrum's promising role in addressing neurological, cardiovascular, metabolic, and inflammatory conditions. We look into the specific health conditions where colostrum demonstrates significant therapeutic potential.

A. Neurological and Cognitive Disorders

Colostrum's therapeutic potential for neurological and cognitive disorders is underscored by its rich composition of growth factors, immunoglobulins, and other bioactive components. These elements play a significant role in brain health and function, particularly in the context of neurodegenerative diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's disease (Poonia & Shiva, 2022).

- **Colostrum's Role in Managing Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease:** Research has demonstrated that colostrum can exert neuroprotective effects, potentially slowing the progression of neurodegenerative diseases. The growth factors in colostrum, such as transforming growth factor-beta (TGF- β) and insulin-like growth factor-1 (IGF-1), are crucial for neuronal development, repair, and protection. These factors help maintain synaptic plasticity and neuronal integrity, which are essential for cognitive function. Additionally, immunoglobulins in colostrum can modulate neuroinflammation, a key factor in the pathology of Alzheimer's disease. By reducing inflammation and supporting neuronal health, colostrum may contribute to improved cognitive outcomes and potentially delay the onset of cognitive decline.

- **Impact on Cognitive Function:** Beyond neurodegenerative diseases, colostrum has been shown to positively influence cognitive function in healthy individuals as well. The presence of growth factors and nutritional components in colostrum supports brain health by enhancing neural connectivity and cognitive performance. For individuals experiencing age-related cognitive decline, colostrum's ability to support brain function and mitigate inflammatory damage offers a potential avenue for cognitive enhancement and maintenance.

B. Cardiovascular and Metabolic Health

As evidenced by Playford & Weiser (2021), Colostrum's benefits extend to cardiovascular and metabolic health, where its anti-inflammatory and regulatory properties provide therapeutic value.

- **Benefits for Cardiovascular Diseases:** The anti-inflammatory properties of colostrum, attributed to its immunoglobulins and growth factors, are beneficial for cardiovascular health. Chronic inflammation is a significant risk factor for cardiovascular diseases, including hypertension, atherosclerosis, and heart disease. Colostrum can help reduce systemic inflammation and improve endothelial function, which is crucial for maintaining vascular health. Research indicates that the bioactive compounds in colostrum may help lower blood pressure, reduce cholesterol levels, and enhance overall cardiovascular function, thereby mitigating the risk of cardiovascular events.

- **Effects on Type-2 Diabetes and Metabolic Syndrome:** Colostrum also holds promise for managing type-2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome. Its growth factors and bioactive peptides play a role in improving insulin sensitivity and glucose metabolism. By enhancing cellular repair and metabolic function, colostrum may help regulate blood sugar levels and reduce the risk of developing type-2 diabetes. Additionally, its anti-inflammatory effects contribute to the management of metabolic syndrome, a condition characterized by insulin resistance, hypertension, and dyslipidemia. Colostrum's impact on metabolic health supports its potential as a complementary therapy for managing chronic metabolic conditions.

C. Skin and Inflammatory Conditions

As found by Parab et al. (2020), Colostrum's therapeutic applications in dermatology and inflammation highlight its versatility and efficacy in treating various conditions.

- **Use in Treating Skin Disorders:** The growth factors and immunoglobulins in colostrum make it an effective treatment for skin disorders such as eczema, psoriasis, and acne. These components promote skin repair, reduce inflammation, and enhance overall skin health. Colostrum can help soothe irritated skin, reduce redness, and accelerate healing processes. Its use in topical formulations and skin care products provides a natural approach to managing chronic skin conditions and improving skin vitality.

- **Anti-Inflammatory Properties:** Colostrum's anti-inflammatory properties are beneficial for addressing systemic inflammatory conditions. Inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease, and systemic lupus erythematosus can be managed with colostrum due to its ability to modulate the immune response and reduce inflammatory markers. By balancing the immune system and reducing inflammation, colostrum helps alleviate symptoms and support recovery from chronic inflammatory diseases. Colostrum's unique composition and therapeutic properties offer substantial benefits across a range of health conditions. Its role in managing neurological disorders, supporting cardiovascular and metabolic health, and addressing skin and inflammatory issues underscores its potential as a versatile and effective natural supplement. As research continues to explore and validate these benefits, colostrum stands out as a valuable adjunct in health and wellness strategies.

V. Safety and Efficacy

As interest in colostrum's therapeutic potential grows, it is crucial to evaluate its safety and efficacy comprehensively. While colostrum offers a range of health benefits, understanding the appropriate dosage, potential risks, and evidence from clinical research is essential for ensuring safe and effective use. Here is a look into the recommended dosages and methods of consumption, safety concerns and side effects, and the current state of clinical research on colostrum.

A. Recommended Dosage and Administration

The safe and effective use of colostrum requires understanding the appropriate dosages and methods of administration. Recommended dosages for general health benefits typically range from 500 mg to 1,000 mg per day, depending on the form of the supplement and individual needs. For specific therapeutic applications, such as gastrointestinal health or enhanced recovery in athletes, higher doses up to 2,000 mg per day may be employed. Colostrum is available in various forms, including powders, capsules, and liquid extracts (Arslan et al., 2021). Powders and capsules are convenient for daily supplementation, while liquid extracts are often used for more immediate therapeutic effects. Fortified dairy products, like milk drinks and butter, provide an alternative method for incorporating colostrum into the diet, offering both nutritional benefits and immune support. Additionally, topical applications such as creams can be used for skin conditions. Each form of colostrum has different absorption rates and bioavailability, influencing its effectiveness.

B. Safety Concerns and Side Effects

Colostrum is generally well-tolerated, but it can cause mild gastrointestinal issues in some people, such as bloating or diarrhea, particularly at higher doses. Individuals with dairy allergies or lactose intolerance should exercise caution, as colostrum is derived from milk and may trigger allergic reactions. To mitigate potential adverse effects, it is advisable for such individuals to consult healthcare professionals before starting colostrum supplements. Regulatory considerations for colostrum supplements vary by region.

In the United States, colostrum is categorized as a dietary supplement and is subject to Good Manufacturing Practices, though it does not require pre-market approval. In Europe and other regions, regulatory requirements may differ, necessitating adherence to local safety and efficacy standards. Consumers should select colostrum products from reputable manufacturers to ensure quality and safety compliance.

C. Clinical Research and Evidence

The clinical research on colostrum supports its efficacy for various health benefits. Studies have consistently demonstrated that colostrum enhances immune function, supports gastrointestinal health, and aids in athletic recovery.

Research highlights its role in reducing gastrointestinal inflammation and improving recovery times for athletes. However, gaps remain in the research, particularly regarding the long-term effects of colostrum supplementation and the optimal dosages for different health conditions. There is a need for more extensive and diverse clinical trials to confirm existing benefits and explore additional therapeutic uses.

Future research should aim to address these gaps, providing a more comprehensive understanding of colostrum's potential and guiding effective use in clinical practice. As research progresses, colostrum's role as a beneficial health adjunct continues to be a promising area of investigation.

VI. Challenges and Future Perspectives

As interest in colostrum grows due to its potential health benefits, addressing the existing challenges and exploring future research directions becomes crucial. Colostrum, with its unique blend of bioactive components, offers a range of therapeutic possibilities; however, the field is not without its obstacles.

The variability in colostrum quality and the limited scope of current research pose significant hurdles. Ensuring consistency in colostrum products and validating their efficacy through robust clinical trials are essential steps to fully realize its potential.

Moving forward, the research landscape must tackle these challenges head-on to advance the application of colostrum in healthcare. Standardizing production methods, expanding clinical studies, and exploring innovative

uses will be key to overcoming existing limitations. By addressing these issues, the field can unlock new opportunities for colostrum-based therapies and enhance our understanding of this remarkable first milk.

A. Challenges in Colostrum Research and Application

Despite the promising benefits of colostrum, several challenges persist in its research and application. One major challenge is the variability in colostrum quality and composition, which can impact its efficacy. Factors such as the source of colostrum, processing methods, and storage conditions can influence the concentration of bioactive components, leading to inconsistencies in product quality. This variability makes it difficult to standardize dosages and ensure consistent therapeutic outcomes.

Another challenge is the limited scope of clinical research on colostrum. While there is substantial evidence supporting its benefits, many studies have small sample sizes or lack rigorous design. This limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions about its efficacy and safety across diverse populations and health conditions. Furthermore, there is a need for more research to explore the long-term effects of colostrum supplementation and its interactions with other treatments or medications.

B. Future Research Directions

Future research should address these challenges by focusing on several key areas. First, efforts should be made to standardize colostrum production and processing to ensure consistent quality and potency. This includes developing robust protocols for sourcing, handling, and manufacturing colostrum products. Establishing clear guidelines and quality control measures can help enhance product reliability and efficacy.

Second, more extensive and well-designed clinical trials are needed to validate the therapeutic benefits of colostrum across various health conditions. Research should focus on large-scale, multi-center studies that examine the effects of colostrum on different populations, including those with specific health conditions or genetic predispositions. This will help establish evidence-based recommendations for colostrum use and address existing gaps in knowledge.

C. Exploring Novel Applications

In addition to standardizing production and expanding clinical research, exploring novel applications of colostrum presents an exciting avenue for future investigation. Researchers should consider how colostrum might be used in combination therapies or integrated into new therapeutic approaches.

Investigating interactions between colostrum and other nutrients, medications, or treatments could reveal synergistic effects and broaden its therapeutic potential. Collaboration between researchers, healthcare providers, and industry stakeholders will be crucial in advancing this field and discovering innovative uses for colostrum.

VII. Conclusion

Colostrum emerges as a remarkable substance with a broad spectrum of benefits and applications, underscoring its significance in both health and wellness. This first milk, produced during the initial days post-birth, is rich in essential nutrients, growth factors, and immune-boosting components.

Its therapeutic potential spans various domains, including immune system support, gastrointestinal health, and even the management of specific health conditions such as neurological disorders, cardiovascular diseases, and skin conditions. The incorporation of colostrum into commercial products, ranging from dairy fortifications to dietary supplements, further highlights its versatility and growing appeal among health-conscious consumers.

The implications of colostrum's benefits are profound, offering a valuable resource for enhancing overall health and addressing diverse medical needs. However, the field is not without its challenges. Issues such as variability in colostrum quality, inconsistent dosing, and the need for more extensive clinical research pose hurdles that must be addressed to fully harness its potential.

Looking forward, future research directions should focus on standardizing production methods, expanding clinical trials, and exploring novel applications to overcome these challenges. By advancing our understanding and application of colostrum, we can unlock new therapeutic possibilities and improve health outcomes.

Overall, colostrum holds significant promise as a multifaceted health resource, and ongoing efforts to refine its use, ensure quality, and explore its benefits will be crucial in realizing its full potential and maximizing its impact on global health.

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